

The State of the Church

(Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 9:23-26)

Yearly Theme: *“Patience is...”*

Series Title: *“Vision and Purpose”*

August 28th, 2022

Something to think about:

Here are some current statistics this morning on the state of the American Church. Some of them may not be all that surprising to you, but some might. According to Lifeway Research Group¹:

- 47% of Americans are members of a house of worship
- 4,500 U.S. Protestant churches closed in 2019
- 3 in 10 Unchurched Americans say a Christian has shared the gospel with them
- 39% of Americans see pastors as honest
- 37% of Americans have confidence in the church
- 65 people attend the median U.S. church each week

In this final week of our series on “Vision and Purpose” we will be exploring, how to be and make disciples. For North Main, this is the very purpose of our existence. One final time, let’s read the Great Commission as the basis for our vision and mission as a church:

Matthew 28:16-20 (NLT)

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Here’s the takeaway this morning:

Key Point: *“Making disciples is the litmus test for a healthy church.”*

We’ve learned over the past few weeks that a disciple is one who “knows Christ intimately, grows in Christ continually, and goes for Christ daily.” We’ve explored the

various ways in which these disciplines happen, and we’ve hopefully learned the means by which we, ourselves, can continue to develop these disciplines in our own lives. However, we must also be helping others to make this decision and live out these disciplines as well.

In Luke’s Gospel in the New Testament, Jesus takes a moment in His development of the Twelve, as well as the crowds who had gathered around Him, to instruct them on what discipleship really is. Let’s check it out:

Luke 9:23-26 (NLT),

23 Then [Jesus] said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. 24 If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. 25 And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? 26 If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels.”

So, a disciple, or as we call them here at North Main, “a completely committed follower of Christ,” is “all in” for Christ in every aspect of their life. And being a disciple of Christ and making disciples of Christ requires:

- Self-denial.
- Taking up your cross daily.
- Following Christ.
- Sharing the message of Christ.

Something to take home:

So that is the state of the church here at North Main? I would like to believe that we’re in the process of developing completely committed followers of Christ. I would like to believe that every member of this congregation has taken seriously the mandate to be and to make disciples of Christ. I would like to believe that the evidence of this would be a healthy, vibrant, growing body of Christ here at the top of North Main Street hill in Butler, PA. But this takes everyone who calls this their home church to be in the constant process of denying self, taking up their cross, following Christ, and sharing the message of Christ as they go about their days, weeks, months, and years.

Key Point: *“Making disciples is the litmus test for a healthy church.”*

¹ Aaron Earls, “22 Vital Stats for Ministry in 2022,” Lifeway Research, January 11, 2022, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/01/05/22-vital-stats-for-ministry-in-2022/>.